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ABSTRACT

The current demands for values education, like recent basic educational reforms generally, reflect a superficial consensus. The push for values education by educators and politicians is a response to two developments: (1) the public's perception that schools are too disorderly; and (2) a desire to inculcate a common belief system. However, the ideal of common (moral) education has always collided with the reality of a segmented society. Regarding the current demands for values education, there is difficulty in distinguishing between moral education and civic education and in finding a common values core. Appeals to rhetorical consensus gloss over policy dilemmas. Deviating from Mario Cuomo's and William Bennett's "moral literacy" rhetoric, the New York State Education Department recently proposed a civic approach to values education. Each student will respect and practice basic civic values and acquire the skills, knowledge, understanding, and attitudes necessary to participate in democratic self-governance. This means: (1) understanding and acceptance of the values of justice, honesty, self-discipline, due process, equality, and majority rule with respect for minority rights; (2) respect for self, others, and property as integral to a self-governing, democratic society; and (3) ability to apply reasoning skills and the democratic government process to resolve societal problems and disputes. The New York approach is presented as being most practically effective, politically acceptable, theoretically justifiable, and consistent with long-range educational reform. (21 references) (MLH)

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Rhetorical Consensus and Policy Dilemmas: Values Education in New York State

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RHETORICAL CONSENSUS AND POLICY DILEMMAS: VALUES EDUCATION IN NEW YORK STATE

David C. Paris

Spring 1988

Appeals to (the Appeal of) Consensus

Over the last year, a number of educators and public officials have urged the public schools to explicitly teach moral values. This idea is supported by an incredibly broad group. Mario Cuomo and William Bennett have given speeches supporting the idea of values education.[1] Mary Harwood Futrell, President of the National Education Association, has noted the widespread fear that "the moral fiber of the country is falling apart. [People] turn to the schools to do something about it." California's Superintendent of Public Instruction, Bill Honig, voiced a similar sentiment in a more succinct way, "we've ended up with students who are ethically illiterate."[2] Politics may create strange bedfellows, but on the issue of values education virtually everyone seems to be in a single bed. Republican and Democrat, labor and management all seem to agree that, as Bennett puts it, "We should 'teach values' the same way we teach other things."

In New York State, Cuomo's call for values education led to a spat with Gordon Ambach, the State Commissioner of Education during the 1985–86 school year. Ambach, annoyed at what he took to be implicit criticism of his stewardship, argued that the state had already embarked on a program of values education. "In 1984, when we developed the Regents Action Plan," Ambach stated, "we put a very heavy emphasis on the teaching of values, particularly the teaching of civic values." The Governor's complaint, Ambach implied, was based on a misunderstanding or ignorance of what the State Education Department was already doing. The Department had and would continue to reflect the growing consensus about the need for values education. "I say, 'Welcome aboard, Governor'."[3]

There is nothing unusual in trying to blunt criticism by attempting to promote consensus—we are all "for" values education. There is also nothing unusual in an elected official not being fully apprised of bureaucratic policies, especially those which have not been fully implemented. Nevertheless, the Governor's call and the Commissioner's response should not be dismissed as a mere misunderstanding. There are, it will be argued here, critical differences between and among programs for values education. Rhetorical consensus with regard to educational reform generally, or values education in particular, tends to mask important policy differences among various proposals. These differences represent real policy choices which need to be evaluated. Sorting and evaluating these options requires an examination of arguments for educational reform, both in general and in the case of values education, in light of varying expectations about the role of public education in a democracy. If this approach seems a bit theoretical or abstract, it should nonetheless yield a clearer picture of what is at stake in policies on values education.

At first glance the calls for values education may seem to be a logical extension of the national reform movement started by the report of the President's Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983. Its warning that American education was threatened by "a rising tide of mediocrity" prompted an intense discussion of the quality of public education. At the same time, the results of a number of field studies of schools were published, as well as several other commission reports, which offered a wide range of recommendations for improving the schools.[4] The rhetoric of crisis has, over the last few years, prompted some reforms, most notably in strengthened curricular requirements and improved teacher pay.

It is important to note that demands for reform often involve appeals to consensual values and understandings. For example, Chester Finn claims that the reform movement has the potential to be an "epochal" transformation of American education because it "draws its force neither from the Federal government nor from the profession. It is very nearly a populist movement, led primarily by self-interested parents and employers and by elected officials responding to overt and implicit signals from the voting, tax-paying public."[5] Although Finn does not spell out a precise creed for this coalition, the basic outlook is by now familiar. The schools have been indicted (and convicted) of requiring too little of students in both academic performance and personal behavior. The mediocre, undisciplined students coming out of the public schools are unlikely to help America retain its economic and political position in the world. The remedy for this state of affairs involves better training and pay for teachers and increased curricular and personal requirements for students. The "new consensus" requires us to change those elements of current curriculum and practice which undercut academic rigor and the pursuit of excellence.[6]

The current demands for values education have followed a similar pattern. We have looked at ourselves and found ourselves wanting, presumably through weakness of will. We *know* what we want from the schools in terms of values education and now we must demand that the schools deliver. There is a consensus about the need for values and the role of the school in promoting them which can guide reform. As Cuomo puts it, "at the core of every society is a set of moral values, a code of behavior, a credo . . . there is a rough—but clear—national understanding of what is right and wrong, what is allowed and forbidden, what we are entitled to and what we owe." William Bennett expresses a similar sentiment and provides a list of specific character traits that make up "moral literacy":

> In defining good character we should include specific traits such as thoughtfulness, fidelity, kindness, diligence, honesty, fairness, self-discipline, respect for law, and taking one's guidance by accepted and tested standards of right and wrong rather than by, for example, one's personal preferences. Now it seems to me that there is a good deal of consensus among the American people about these character traits.[7]

As in the earlier calls for reform, the current pleas for values education make appeals to a consensus about basic values as both the reason and the guide to specific policy changes. A number of states and districts have already introduced specific curricula and courses for teaching values.[8] New York State, as noted previously, has considered similar proposals since the development of the Action Plan and is preparing to implement a program for values education.

The Shallow Consensus: "What?" and "How Far?"

If there were a genuine consensus about the basic purpose(s) of public education, then the current proposals for teaching values would be a logical extension, perhaps the next stage, in an "epochal transformation" of the schools. It makes a good script: American public, outraged by educational decline, initially demands that schools shape up, set higher standards, provide the knowledge and skills necessary to meet economic and political challenges, and, *finally,* to teach and promote the fundamental values of American culture. Once we recognize this consensus, the transformation can begin.

As attractive as this script is, it is unlikely to be played out. Whatever consensus there is about education, in general or with regard to values education, it is shallow and insufficient to generate an "epochal transformation." It is shallow because there is only imperfect agreement on the basic issues of *what* the schools ought to be doing and *how far* the schools ought to go in pursuing some aim(s). This lack of a fundamental consensus is the result of ideological problems concerning the role of education in a democratic society. More specifically, in a democratic society, public education is simultaneously practically necessary and theoretically suspect. As a practical matter, public education is the vehicle which enables individuals to satisfy the requirements of a free society. It provides the practical means for social integration, economic training, and equal opportunity (or other purposes) left unspecified by democratic ideology. But the practical value of public education is no guarantor against ideological criticism. As state institutions the schools are always open to criticism that they are interfering with groups and individuals in a free society. The schools are open to criticism that they are doing either the wrong things (producing a "tide of mediocrity") or that they are doing too much or too little of something which is arguably appropriate for the schools, e.g. in values education. Thus any proclamations of consensus are likely to be temporary at best and produce only the most gradual shifts in actual school practices. Appeals to rhetorical consensus can gloss over these problems, but educational policymakers must make decisions to deal with them.

In spite of appeals to a "new consensus" about public education, a close look at the literature on general educational reform reveals two distinct views of the objectives (the *what*) of public education (see Appendix A). On the one hand, the major commission reports tend toward what might be called an "achievement-productivity" view of public education. The major client of the public schools is the economy. The schools are to teach students specific skills and award them credentials which they may then use to achieve their (usually economic) goals. Society in turn benefits since economic competitiveness depends upon a trained and disciplined pool of talent. Competitiveness requires that all or nearly all students cross a basic threshold of linguistic and scientific competence and that many go on to develop the high level technical skills crucial to the future economy.

In contrast, the various field studies endorse some version of what might be called a "new common school" orientation. In this view, the schools should be less concerned with the economy and more concerned with the social and political integration of all students. This is achieved by providing all students with the same stock of knowledge and skills; "quality" means setting a higher standard of general education rather than achievement in specific subjects or technical skills. The major focus for reform is pedagogical, not curricular. Teachers must engage their students in critical thinking about fundamental principles rather than merely "covering" subjects. Above all, public education must have as its first priority a sound, general education for all students.

There are other significant differences in the reform literature. Even if genuine consensus on objectives (*what*) could be achieved, there would still be a question of *how far* educational institutions ought to go toward achieving them. In each orientation there is both a minimal and maximal version of its program (see Fig. 1). For example, the productivity-achievement orientation can be interpreted as requiring a turn toward "high-tech" education, upgrading curricular requirements in occupationally relevant areas (math, science) and sorting

and tracking students. But this strategy may be criticized as being both prudentially and morally dubious. It is not clear that the schools can play a key role in increasing productivity, especially as rapid shifts in skills may be needed. Alternatively, it is tempting to suggest that economic needs and equal opportunity are best served by a minimal approach emphasizing general education as the best vehicle for serving the economy.

Orientation Toward Public Schools' Priorities

Scope of Public School's Purpose	New Common School	Productivity–Achievement
Minimum	Basic "literacy, numeracy, and knowledge for responsible citizenship."	Basic skills, habits and attitudes formed through general education
Maximum	A "core of common learning," reviving the humanities.	"Mobilizing the workforce," "technologically sophisticated" education.

Figure 1: Minimum and maximum goals of school reform.

Similarly, the new common school vision is often interpreted to require a more rigorous ideal curriculum or "core of common learning." For example, some propose making the humanities central in the curriculum as a way of requiring "cultural literacy." At the same time, there are others, such as Theodore Sizer, who suggest that a public school in a democratic society can only require the most basic "literacy, numeracy, and knowledge for responsible citizenship." Anything beyond these minimal requirements, Sizer warns, risks imposing "culture and morality."[9] New common school advocates, then, also differ in how far they would go in promoting commonality through public education.

It is tempting to dismiss these differences as merely matters of emphasis. It is a commonplace that we expect the schools to perform several tasks more or less extensively. The differences in the reform literature, it might be argued, are minor variations around a common rhetoric of universal, quality education. But matters of emphasis are matters of policy. The two orientations suggest some critical differences in policy, for example, concerning the tracking of students. Similarly, the practical suggestions associated with a more minimal approach will differ from a more aggressive policy. More generally, the overall picture of the public school is different depending upon *what* we wish to pursue, and *how far* we wish to pursue it.

If there is any consensus in American education it is typically about the *minimum* goals of education. If we cannot agree on how (whether) students should be prepared for the world of work or the contents of a "common core of learning," we can agree on the need to impart basic skills and habits. This "consensus" hardly counts as an "epochal" transformation or a gearing up of the schools for economic warfare. Since aggressive training programs or controversial moral and cultural topics are unlikely to find a secure home in the public schools, the "basic" skills and subjects will continue to be at the center of public education. Nevertheless, we should not dismiss this result too lightly. If the schools do not produce a millenial vision or results, they do often provide a satisfactory means for realizing basic educational aims. This is similar to the larger political system in which various interests and aims often interact to produce acceptable, if not "epochal," results. The universal provision of basic education, like the democratic resolution of political conflict, should not be taken for granted; it is no mean feat.

"What?" and "How Far?" in Values Education

The current demands for values education, like recent basic educational reforms generally, reflect a superficial consensus. If we look closely at the source and nature of these proposals, it becomes clear that there are similar questions of what the schools ought to be doing and how far they can or should go in trying to accomplish some plausible goals. Equally important, a case can be made in favor of the approach represented in New York's proposals, as distinct from those of more visible public figures such as Bennett and Honig.

The current push for values education by educators and politicians is a response to two things. First, there is, and has been for a while now, a clear public perception that schools are too disorderly. The yearly Gallup survey has for several years ranked discipline as the number one school problem (surpassed only this year by concern about drugs). Growing awareness of drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and just plain lawlessness have made the public receptive to proposals that schools preach and enforce some basic moral precepts. Second, throughout the 1970s educators experimented with curricula that seemed to emphasize the process of making moral judgments, rather than the substance of those judgments. For example, exercises in "values clarification" were popular.[10] These and similar programs often conveyed the notion that the teaching of *any* specific values was an illegitimate imposition on student or parental rights. The excessive relativism of this approach fairly begged for a strong reaction in the other direction. Instead of worrying about *how* students think about moral matters, it is now argued that we should focus on *what* they think—and make sure they think the right things.

Beyond these immediate practical purposes, the demands for values education are a modern echo of the ideals of the common school. Common literacy and skills were not the only, or perhaps even the primary, goal of the original common school. Explicit moral training or, in more sociological language, socialization into the community were part of the curriculum as well. In the nineteenth century common school, values education was a blend of Christianity and civics, inculcating "Protestant-Republican virtue." Then, as now, there were explicit appeals to a core of common (consensual) beliefs which formed the foundation for good character and citizenship. As Horace Mann put it: "Those articles in the creed of

Republicanism, which are accepted by all, and which form the basis of our political faith, shall be taught to all." As noted previously, many current reformers cite an equivalent "creed" and hope to "reinvent the modern equivalent of the McGuffey reader."[11]

Whatever romantic notions we might have about the original common school, it is important to keep in mind two historical facts. First, the substance of the "common" beliefs taught in the original common school was under attack almost from the beginning. The ideal of common (moral) education collided with the reality of a segmented society. For example, Catholics strongly resisted the use of a Protestant Bible in education and suspected that other heretical beliefs were being foisted on their children. By 1872, required Bible readings were eliminated on constitutional grounds. Second, although segmentation took, and still takes, many forms (racial, linguistic), the primary conflicts over moral training were religious. The teaching of civics has been less controversial. Indeed, although moral and citizenship training have often been equated with one another, it has typically been the schools' forays into religious topics which has led to moral controversy and constitutional challenges.[12] Indeed, the schools have been recently challenged for their avoidance of or alleged biases against religion.

This historical digression suggests two important points about the current demands for values education: (1) There is a distinction between moral education, broadly understood, and citizenship training or civic education. (2) There is a difficulty in finding a common "core," whatever conception of values of education one adopts, because the schools can always be accused of doing too much or not enough. That is, the same dilemmas which confront basic educational reform ("What?" "How Far?") also confront values education in its various forms. They cannot be overcome by appeal to a shallow consensus "for" (substantive) values education. Being "for" a more substantive approach to values education—as opposed to a relativistic or process approach such as values clarification—does not answer many of the key policy questions involved or directly respond to kinds of dilemmas mentioned above.

First, the term "values education," not surprisingly, covers a variety of distinctive enterprises. One crucial way of sorting through these is by distinguishing "moral" from "civic" education. The former is a more general category, seeking to teach the broadest moral principles. Even approaches which deny any universally valid moral principles (values clarification) may engage in moral education by getting students to clarify their personal moral principles. "Civic" education, on the other hand, is more exclusively concerned with the relationship of the individual to the political system. It may seek to inculcate certain political norms or conversely train students to social criticism and activism.[13] In any case its concerns are less focused on the relationship of the individual to some moral principle(s) and more toward his or her relationship to society and particularly the state. As displayed in Figure 2, there are, as in public education generally, differences in *what* we expect schools to do in values education.

Second, once we distinguish "moral" from "civic" values education, we again find the dilemma of excess and deficit. That is, although both approaches to values education function within a common school orientation, they each face possible criticisms for doing too much (imposition) or too little (relativism). In moral education, a strong commitment to substantive values is likely to be opposed by groups who want a different set of values taught. The values clarification approach attempted to avoid the charge of imposition only to confront the charge of relativism. Civic education is somewhat less prone to this dilemma, although some efforts

Scope of Values Education	Orientation Toward Values Education: Moral Education	Orientation Toward Values Education: Civic Education
Minimum	Values clarification, self-discovery of personal values.	"Reasoning skills," political means for dealing with value differences.
Maximum	"Moral literacy," teaching substantive values and forming "character."	Patriotism, conformity to political values (supporting or dissenting).

Figure 2: Minimum and maximum goals of values education.

to inculcate "American" values, e.g. laws requiring all to attend a public school or pledge allegiance, have gone too far and been declared unconstitutional. A more typical criticism is that civic education has not done enough to make students aware of their political tradition and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. In any case, setting priorities and finding the balance between extensive and minimal demands plagues values education no less than general approaches to public education.

One way to illustrate these difficulties is to note which groups are likely to be skeptical of revised programs of values education. It is interesting to note that resistance to this new "consensus" is likely to come from two often opposed groups. First, there is a growing number of parents who complain that the values which are likely to be taught in the public schools are simply wrong. The lawsuits by Christian parents concerning textbooks are the most notable example here. The parents are in effect saying that what the current crop of reformers knows to be consensual moral values is likely to be some form of the dreaded secular humanism rather than some appropriate (Christian) teaching. If the schools became more aggressive in teaching certain values, it is likely other parents would voice comparable concerns for the "right" (their) values. At the opposite end of the spectrum are some local school officials who fear that a more aggressive approach to values education will leave them open to parental criticism, for example, that they are anti(pro)Christian or pro(anti)sex, etc. As one district superintendent put it, "Whose version of ethics would we use? It's outside the scope of our charge to teach morals."[14]

Thus the new consensus on values education falls prey to the same kind of dilemmas which confront the more general pleas for basic educational reform. It is one thing to say that we want to teach children to be honest, kind, etc., it is quite another to establish a specific curriculum in moral education which does not offend some groups. A listing of values is not a

substitute for a genuine consensus about what ("Whose version . . . ?") is taught under the banner of moral education. Similarly, the values clarification approach and the reaction to it indicates that there is no stable consensus about how far schools should go in promoting morality. A purely procedural approach seems open to the charge of doing too little (relativism) while many current proposals such as Bennett's will almost certainly be criticized for going too far (imposition).

Values Education: The New York Approach

Appeals to rhetorical consensus gloss over policy dilemmas. Making specific policies requires weighing competing considerations and making clear distinctions about what is at stake in different policies. This is often especially true of those who are charged with framing and administering public policy. In a recent proposal to the New York Board of Regents, the State Education Department offered the following goals for values education:

> Each student will respect and practice basic civic values and acquire the skills, knowledge, understanding, and attitudes necessary to participate in democratic self-governance. Included are:
>
> Understanding and acceptance of the values of justice, honesty, self-discipline, due process, equality, and majority rule with respect for minority rights.
>
> Respect for self, others and property as integral to a self-governing, democratic society.
>
> Ability to apply reasoning skills and the process of democratic government to resolve societal problems and disputes.[15]

When we compare these proposals concerning values education to those offered by Cuomo (initially)[16], Bennett, *et al.* we find: (1) The Education Department proposals emphasize a "civic" version of values education as opposed to a more directly "moral" approach. (2) These proposals treat values education as an embedded part of the regular curriculum rather than a separate subject. (3) These proposals place a greater emphasis on critical reasoning skills as an integral part of understanding substantive civic values. Because of these features it can be argued that the current "bureaucratic" proposals are superior to those made by more visible public figures; they are a better response to the dilemmas cited above than proposals offered by Bennett and others. Indeed, these proposals can serve as a kind of model, suggesting a more general approach to understanding the role of public education in a democratic society.

There are several things noteworthy about the above list of goals. First, unlike the list of values offered by Bennett, these "civic values" have a decidedly political character. The last two elements are almost exclusively political, and half of the first list mentions specifically political values. This is quite distinct from the list of character traits cited by Bennett. The state approach is also distinctive in that the above goals are not part of a separate curriculum, but are embedded in all other subjects. Proposed guidelines for syllabi specify how each subject area can raise values issues. For example, in the sciences the proposals mention the values implicit in research ("valuing truthful reporting") and the implications of science and technology for society. This is different from the suggestions offered by Bennett and Honig who propose the teaching of values as an independent topic in the curriculum, "like physics."

Finally, the state proposals also emphasize the skills related to moral judgment rather than emphasizing the "right" answer. Of course, there are substantive values that are widely shared ("honesty," "self-discipline") and the state syllabi reflect these. But most social problems reflect differences in how shared values are to be applied. Students therefore need to develop "reasoning skills" which will permit them to deal with the intellectual difficulties of applying shared values and the political means for resolving disputes. Above all, students must recognize the possibility of reasonable disagreement requiring political adjudication and understand how the political process resolves these problems: "Even when all sides in a dispute over the application of an accepted civic value to a particular instance are being reasonable, they may still disagree over this application . . . . Our society has procedures for making decisions in such cases."[17] That is, the reasoning skills associated with civic values are not a guarantee of "right" answers, but are part of a broader set of social and political rules and institutions.

Different doesn't necessarily mean better, but there are several reasons for preferring the State Education Department approach. It is likely to be most practically effective, politically acceptable, and theoretically justifiable. First, although Bennett and others repeatedly cite the "basic values" that should be taught, they do not indicate how these are to be taught in a way which is both nontrivial and noncontroversial. Certainly we could tell children that it is wrong to lie, steal, etc., but the real moral problems which trouble our society are issues where the implications of these "basic" values are in dispute. For example, it is one thing to teach that murder is wrong and quite another to say whether abortion is murder. Perhaps equally important, there are already two vehicles for teaching whatever common personal morality we do share—current programs in health which emphasize self-esteem and problem-solving, and the "hidden curriculum" of the rules and practices of the school. As a practical matter, then, both of these are likely to be more powerful than the "finger-wagging" of a separate curriculum on morality.

It is also important to note that appropriate civic values are really little different from appropriate academic values. Existing academic subjects are a natural vehicle for teaching important values. They provide a more practical means of teaching students about the values implicit in all aspects of life than a litany or catechism of "fundamental" moral values. As Diane Ravitch eloquently points out:

> The answer for demands for character development in the schools lies not in the creation of new courses but in recognizing that the school already has powerful resources . . . . Science, properly taught, teaches children the values that are embedded in scientific inquiry: honesty, open-mindedness, critical thinking, and the capacity to withhold judgment in the absence of evidence . . . literature is a potent vehicle for questions of social and personal values . . . history provides limitless prospects for the study of values and ethics. It is a living laboratory in which to consider the relations of ideas, actions, and consequences . . . . As humanistic studies, literature and history inevitably evoke questions of value and inspire questioning about the nature of the good society, the moral attributes of a good life and the qualities of character that awaken our admiration or elicit our contempt.[18]

In either case, then, effective values education is more a by-product of the normal operation of a good school than a separate academic subject.

The kind of approach suggested by these proposals is also more likely to be politically acceptable. As noted previously, there is a "bias toward the minimum" implicit in the situation of the schools in a democratic society. An aggressive policy of moral, as distinct from civic, education, is likely to run afoul of parents' moral beliefs. Indeed, it is hard to see how any such program could avoid it since it would have to take up the question of the role of religious beliefs in forming "character." The civic education approach is less likely to challenge parents' personal beliefs since it appeals to (civic) values which are arguably the proper province of public schools and which may be shared by groups with different and even conflicting moral and political outlooks.

Finally, the State Education Department approach seems more readily justifiable in terms of the proper scope of public institutions in a democratic society. Even if we could discover some expansive common morality, it is doubtful that the schools, as state institutions, should teach it. We should be very wary of the idea of promoting some specific vision of morality through the schools. What the government can and should support is students' understandings of the rights and responsibilities of a free society—and demand that they abide by the basic rules of citizenship. What is crucial about citizenship in a democratic society is not the blind allegiance to certain values, be they civic or moral, but an ability to deal with the values of others in a humane way. In a democratic society, the point of values education is less one of providing a common set of substantive principles than of teaching the political norms of democracy. This means explicitly teaching the values of plurality, tolerance and rights as the moral precepts which underlie society. These principles are not fixed formulae for moral judgment or the moral truths of a "credo." Rather, as Irving Horowitz puts it, "moral education for democracy entails the ability to learn how to absorb information about people with different sentiments, values and interests. This . . . is the opposite of a notion of 'our' teaching 'them' right values."[19]

Values Education and Educational Reform

This result may leave many unhappy. Those favoring moral education will be dissatisfied with a relatively limited focus on civic values, in spite of the historical and contemporary obstacles confronting moral education. Some may find civic education, as described in the State Education Department proposals, as too weak because it does not emphasize the "right" or "core" values. Less likely, though still possible, some will find it too strong in its promotion of certain values. For example, some parents in Amherst, Massachusetts, wanted social studies books removed because they were not critical enough of American history. (Parochialism is not the sole property of the Christian right.) Civic education is far from a guaranteed solution to the problem of values education; the dilemmas of education in a democratic society are always with us. Probably the most we can legitimately expect is something like the New York State approach, an approach which appeals to widely shared civic, rather than moral, values, and which emphasizes process ("reasoning skills") as much as or more than substance.

It is important not to dismiss this result too lightly. If civic education does not contribute to an "epochal" transformation of the schools, it can serve as a model for clarifying some possibilities for educational reform. More specifically, it focuses our attention on the

importance of a *common* public education as opposed to one emphasizing individual skill and achievement, and it emphasizes the importance of skills which have practical importance and results, rather than academic coverage.

First, the civic approach to values education reminds us that an appropriate political philosophy of public education should set as its priority the aims of the common school over any explicitly economic functions. The priority of the social and political functions of the schools can be initially established by default. It is doubtful that, beyond certain thresholds of basic education, schools have the economic significance attributed to them by some reformers. The evidence on the relationship between education and productivity is at best mixed and whatever legitimate economic functions the schools perform are best served by general education. Any more specialized training or sorting is best handled somewhere else.[20]

More positively, the case for the priority of the common school can be made if we remind ourselves of the role of the schools in bridging a gap between theory and practice in a democratic society. Since democratic theory does not provide a practical means for integrating separate individuals, there needs to be some active agent which provides the common ground without which the pursuit of separate interests and ways of life is impossible. There must be some common base of knowledge, skills, and even cultural and moral understandings to serve as the precondition for participating in the varied ways of life in a free society. The schools, as public institutions, have the responsibility to provide this common base, and to demand that students achieve appropriate levels of knowledge and skills. This common base is not provided if the schools are seen as merely an arena for economic competition conducted by other means. In the educational realm, the democratic state has an interest in some minimal social unity which overrides the extremes of individualism and competitiveness (as in the productivity–achievement orientation). The schools provide one, perhaps the only, legitimate opportunity to serve this public interest and civic education is perhaps the best and most legitimate vehicle for realizing this interest.

Second, the State Education Department approach to values education suggests that what is crucial to values education (and, by implication, education generally) is the understanding of plurality and the means for dealing with it. Many current proposals for educational reform simply state requirements for a number of subjects over a number of years or some "core" of "great works" in the humanities. These proposals are peculiar in light of the fact that almost all the recent field studies reported that the real difficulty in public education is the mindless teaching of facts and coverage of topics. What is typically lacking is some spark of controversy and some feeling of the real (nonacademic) significance of the topic at hand. Admittedly, many sins have been committed in the name of relevance. Nevertheless, the civic values approach recognizes the need for focusing on controversy and suggesting ways of dealing with a plurality of views.

An emphasis on pluralism and critical thinking is both a preferred approach to values education and public education generally. A free society may not have any compelling vision of the public good, but it does share the view that a variety of viewpoints should be put forward and entertained. It seems appropriate, if slightly paradoxical, to say that what Americans ultimately share is a commitment to plurality, to limiting the values which any individual is required to share with others. If this is the case, then values education is, as Horowitz points out, primarily a matter of teaching people how to deal with others who differ

in their interests and values. The same can be said for education generally. Unfortunately, it has often been the tendency of public education to either filter out differences, as in textbooks, or to mandate an artificial pluralism. For example, teaching creationism in a biology course might be a valuable way of illustrating how scientific disputes can (or sometimes cannot) be resolved by reference to data, i.e. as a vehicle for teaching critical thinking. It has considerably less value if taught as a legislatively declared coequal theory with evolution. In any case, what is implied by political philosophy is consistent with good pedagogy; controversy is preferable to the mindless teaching of "facts."[21]

Bashing bureaucrats is a favorite sport of politicians. However, if the above analysis is correct, some bureaucratic proposals on values education are a sensible, even model, response to a crucial educational problem. If these proposals do not have the rhetorical appeal of promises of "epochal" transformation or "moral literacy," they do suggest sensitivity to the dilemmas of education in a democratic society. The question then is how to make sure that bureaucratic blueprints are realized in the classroom. The history of American education is replete with examples of reforms which never reached the classroom or were smothered there by organizational necessities. Implementation is the next step, since ultimately values education and morality are matters of action, not theory.

Notes

1. Mario Cuomo, Remarks at the Newsday Education Symposium, SUNY College at Old Westbury, March 4, 1987. William Bennett, "Moral Literacy and the Formation of Character," address to the Manhattan Institute, New York, October 30, 1986. The term "values education" will be used here to cover the variety of programs and curricula which may be variously called "moral education," "citizenship training," etc.

2. See William Honig, *Last Chance for Our Children.* Reading: Addison Wesley, 1985, Chapter 5.

3. Marc Humbert, "Ambach Rebuts Cuomo on Values, Defends Regents Action Plan," *Albany Times–Union,* August 30, 1986.

4. The major commission studies include R. Anderson and David Saxon, *America's Competitive Challenge* (Washington: Business–Higher Education Forum, 1983); Committee for Economic Development, *Investing in Our Children* (New York: Committee for Economic Development, 1985); David Gardner, *A Nation at Risk* (Washington: National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983); James Hunt, *Action for Excellence* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1983); Robert Wood, *Making the Grade* (Washington: Twentieth Century Fund, 1983). The major field studies include Ernest Boyer, *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983); John Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw–Hill, 1983); Arthur Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985); Theodore Sizer, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983).

5. Chester Finn, "The Drive for Excellence: Moving Toward a Public Consensus," in B. and R. Gross, eds., *The Great School Debate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 75.

6. Mark Yudof describes the "new consensus" this way: "In the new policy environment, consensus is shaped around the basic mission of the schools. Children are in school to master skills: to master reading, writing, and arithmetic; to establish a foothold in science; to gain familiarity with modern computer technology; and, ultimately, to achieve a secure and productive job. Achievement counts. So does hard evidence of academic success or failure. But the softer variables relating to self and social interaction do not count. No more talk of open classrooms, identity crises, the culture of youth, and the diversities of ethnicity and race. The emphasis is on turning out engineers, scientists, computer programmers, health specialists, and other occupational groups that serve collective interests." "Education Policy and the New Consensus of the 1980s," *Phi Delta Kappan* 65 (1984), 456.

7. Cuomo, "Remarks . . . ," 6; Bennett, "Moral Literacy . . . ," 2.

8. For example, Maryland now requires passing a "citizenship test" for graduation from high school. That state has also specified goals and objectives for character development as part of its citizenship curriculum.

9. Sizer, *Horace's Compromise* . . . , "beyond these three elements, the claims of the state have far less merit. The state has no right to insist that I be 'employable' on its terms of what a 'career' may be . . . . The state has no right or obligation to tell me how to spend my leisure time . . . it is unreasonable of the state to impose upon me its own definition of culture . . . . Beyond expecting me to be sensitive and responsive to legal and constitutional principles that allow freedom, the state has no claim whatsoever on my beliefs and character." 86–87.

10. For a description and critique see William Bennett and Edwin Delattre, "Moral Education in the Schools," *The Public Interest* 50 (1978), 81–99.

11. Gerald Grant, "The Education of Character and the Character of Education," *American Education* 18 (1982), 41.

12. See R. Freeman Butts, *Public Education in the United States.* New York: Holt, 1978, Chs. 4–5.

13. For a further discussion of this distinction, see Jack Nelson, "The Uncomfortable Relationship Between Moral Education and Citizenship Instruction," in Richard Wilson and Gordon Schochet, eds., *Moral Development and Politics* (New York: Praegar, 1980), 256–286.

14. Jonathan Friendly, "Ethics Classes Avoid Teaching Right and Wrong," *New York Times,* December 2, 1985.

15. State Education Department, "Education for Values," item for discussion with the Board of Regents, April 9, 1987, 6.

16. In fairness, it should be said that Cuomo's April 1987 speech is closer to the State proposals than his August criticism. Still, the more recent speech does not adequately distinguish moral from civic education.

17. State Education Department, "Education for Values," position paper, February 8, 1983, 2.

18. Diane Ravitch, *The Schools We Deserve* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 22–23.

19. Irving Horowitz, "Moral Development, Authoritarian Distemper, and the Democratic Persuasion," in Wilson and Schochet, eds., *Moral Development . . .* , 19–20.

20. On the relationship of schooling to the economy see Henry Levin, "Jobs: A Changing Workforce, A Changing Education?" *Change* 16 (1984), 32–37; and Committee on Economic Development, *Investing in Our Children . . .* , Ch. 2.

21. Another suggestion for common, relevant education is offered by Goodlad, who cites a "mini–society" approach to teaching social studies which "takes civics, economics, and aesthetics out of the textbook and into students' lives. But it is in short supply." *A Place Called School . . .* , 240. Obviously this idea and the assertion of the priority of the common school owes much to the work of Dewey and other progressives—and is none the worse for it.

Appendix A: Two Orientations Toward Public School Reform

New Common School	Sizer (1984)	Powell *et al.* (1983)	Goodlad (1983)	Boyer (1983)	"Merged Rhetoric"	CED (1985)	Gardner (1983)	Wood (1983)	Anderson & Saxon (1983)	Hunt (1983)	Productivity–Achievement
• Key Values 1. Moral equality 2. Political integration					• General, quality, public education as best means for economic advancement and social integration						• Key Values 1. Individual achievement 2. Economic productivity
• Principles 1. General education 2. "Core" of skills, cultural and political norms					• Problems of competing goals, equality						• Principles 1. Individualized education 2. Variety of skills, technical competency
• Practices 1. Moral education 2. Standard curriculum 3. Localism											• Practices 1. Technical education 2. Tracking 3. Partial vouchers
• Main area for reform: pedagogy											• Main area for reform: program
• Problems 1. Finding a "core" 2. Mobility/equal opportunity 3. Individual differences/skills											• Problems 1. Empirical evidence for education–economic linkage 2. Mobility/equal opportunity 3. Shifts in skills, requirements

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